

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 EA-06

USIE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-10 AID-05

FDRE-00 /070 W

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O 251510Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3061

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 2941

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CI

SUBJECT: CHILEAN REACTION TO EVENTS IN INDOCHINA

1. SUMMARY: CHILEANS REACT TO EVENTS IN INDOCHINA WITH DEEP DISMAY, LESSENED CONFIDENCE IN US, AND A TENDENCY TO BE UNJUSTLY CRITICAL. AGONY OF VIETNAM CITED AS JUSTIFICATION FOR CHILE'S ANTI-MARXIST POSTURE. WHILE CHILEANS REGARD OUR DETENTE POLICY AS A MISTAKE, THEY CONSIDER A STRONG US THEIR BEST PROTECTION. THEY WILL BE REASSURED IF A NEW CONSENSUS ON US FOREIGN POLICY CAN EMERGE ALONG LINES INDICATED IN PRESIDENT'S TULANE UNIVERSITY SPEECH. END SUMMARY.

2. AS WE HAVE REPORTED (SANTIAGO 2895) CANCELLATION OF THE SECRETARY'S TRUNCATED LATIN AMERICAN TRIP WAS ANTI-CLIMACTIC IN CHILE; THE MAJOR DISAPPOINTMENT HAD OCCURRED WHEN CHILE WAS DROPPED FROM SECRETARY'S ITINERARY.

3. THE CANCELLATION IS RIGHTLY DESCRIBED AS AN OUTGROWTH OF THE UNITED STATES' CASCADING DIFFICULTIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST, CAMBODIA AND NOW FINALLY VIETNAM. CHILEAN PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA HAVE GONE ALL OUT ON INDOCHINA DEVELOPMENTS, VIEWED CONFIDENTIAL

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FROM THEIR OWN PARTICULAR ANGLE. FOR THE FIRST TIME, CHILEANS

NATION-WIDE ARE SHARING THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE OF SEEING A WAR ON THEIR TELEVISION SCREENS ALMOST AS IT HAPPENS. THE IMPACT IS EXCEPTIONAL.

4. FOR THE MOST PART, THE CONFLICT IS INTERPRETED HERE IN STRICTLY BLACK-AND-WHITE TERMS. KHMER ROUGE, HANOI AND PRG ARE VIEWED SIMPLY AS AGENTS OF "INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM." THEY ARE ATTACKED FOR MASSIVE VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LATELY FOR GENOCIDE. SYMPATHY FOR PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIETNAM AS VICTIMS OF COMMUNIST AGGRESSION IS MANIFESTED BY OUTBURST OF PROPOSALS TO TAKING IN VIETNAMESE ORPHANS, BY A BLOOD DONATION CAMPAIGN FOR VIETNAM, AND BY INNUMERABLE RESOLUTIONS OF SUPPORT FOR GVN FROM ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND STUDENT GROUPS. WITH OFFICIAL ENCOURAGEMENT, MUCH IS MADE OF CONTRAST BETWEEN UN'S RPT UN'S UNWILLINGNESS TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS AND PROTEST ATROCITIES IN VIETNAM, AND ALACRITY WITH WHICH IT HARASSES CHILE.

5. NATURALLY, MOST CHILEANS HAVE OBSERVED THE AGONY OF CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM WITH EVER-INCREASING DISMAY. TO THEM, THE TRAIN OF EVENTS HAS SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE. THEY SEE THEMSELVES AS THE ONLY PEOPLE IN RECENT HISTORY WHO HAVE SUCCEEDED IN THROWING OFF THE MARXIST YOKE, AND ACCORDINGLY AS A PARTICULAR TARGET OF HOSTILE COMMUNIST AND COMMUNIST-INSPIRED ACTIVITY ALL OVER THE WORLD. IN THE OFFICIAL VIEW, THE FATE WHICH AWAITS VIETNAM TODAY IS THE SAME FATE CHILEANS ESCAPED BY OVERTHROWING ALLENDE. IT IS THE FATE RESERVED FOR THEM IF LEFTISTS RETURN TO POWER.

6. SINCE IT IS THE US WHICH, WORLD WIDE, HAS BORNE THE BRUNT OF RESISTANCE TO COMMUNIST ADVANCES, AND SINCE THE CHILEANS HAVE SO LITTLE ASIDE FROM THE US TO RELY UPON, THE ADVERSITIES EXPERIENCED IN CAMBODIA AND IN VIETNAM BY THE UNITED STATES HAVE BEEN KEENLY FELT. IN THIS MOMENT OF IMMEDIATE SHOCK, THE US IS BEING CRITICIZED FOR ABANDONING ITS SOUTH EAST ASIAN FRIENDS. IT IS SEEN AS DIMINISHED IN STATURE, AND AS LESS ABLE OR LESS INCLINED TO HELP ITS ALLIES. ITS WORD, ACCORDINGLY, MAY CARRY SOMEWHAT LESS WEIGHT IN CHILE. ONE OR TWO OF THE MORE RESPONSIBLE PUBLICISTS HAVE SOUGHT TO LOOK AT THE SITUATION WITH SOME PERSPECTIVE. BUT THEIRS IS A MINORITY VIEW.

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7. FOR THE MOST PART, CHILEAN OBSERVERS ARE IF ANYTHING PRONE TO EXAGGERATE THE LONG-TERM SIGNIFICANCE OF WHAT HAS HAPPEND. THEY HAVE FOLLOWED THE DEBATE IN THE US BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESS OVER INDOCHINA WITH CONSTERNATION: TO THEM IT PROVES THAT EVEN SO GREAT AND STRONG A COUNTRY CAN BE IMMOBILIZED BY THE FAILINGS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. THEY HAVE PICKED UP EVERY MANIFESTATION OF THE DOMINO SYNDROME, AND EVERY EXPRESSION OF DOUBT AS TO THE CONSTANCY OF THE

USG, FROM WHATEVER COUNTRY. ONE CONCLUSION FREQUENTLY DRAWN IS THAT THE US EXPERIENCE DEMONSTRATES THAT CHILE NEEDS A NON-PARTISAN AUTHORITARIAN STRUCTURE AND A NON-PERMISSIVE SOCIETY IF IT IS TO CONTINUE TO EXIST IN ITS PRESENT FORM -- IN OTHER WORDS, A JUSTIFICATION OF THE JUNTA'S POLICIES AS THEY STAND.

8. THE VISIBLE RESPONSE TO ALL THIS IS CLEARLY NOT ONE OF DEFEATISM. ON THE CONTRARY, THE EXISTING SITUATION IS SEEN AS PROVING THAT THE CHILEANS HAVE BEEN RIGHT ALL ALONG IN TELLING US THAT OUR POLICY OF DETENTE WAS ILLOGICAL AND SELF-DEFEATING. AT THIS MOMENT, THE PREVAILING CHILEAN VIEW IS THAT IF THEY HAD TO GO IT ALONE, THEY WOULD DO SO, BUT THAT THEY HOPED VIETNAM WOULD CAUSE US TO SEE THE LIGHT, TO VIEW CHILE AS A TRUE FRIEND, AND TO ACT ACCORDINGLY.

9. WITHIN THIS GENERAL TYPE OF RESPONSE THERE IS AN INTERESTING VARIANT. THE RADICAL RIGHT, THE HARD-LINE ADVISERS OF THE GOVERNMENT, CANNOT REFRAIN FROM TAKING CHEAP SHOTS AT THE USG WITH A KIND OF "I TOLD YOU SO" EMPHASIS. CLOSEST TO THESE ADVISERS IN THE JUNTA ITSELF IS AIR FORCE GENERAL GUSTAVO LEIGH, WHOSE COMMENTS WE SUMMARIZED IN SANTIAGO 2823 AND SANTIAGO 1867. ANOTHER SUCH VOICE IS THAT OF JUNTA ADVISER JAIME GUZMAN, WHO COMMENTS THAT THE WORLD HAS MOVED FROM A TWO-SUPER POWER TO A ONE-SUPER POWER STATE OF AFFAIRS, SINCE "THE UNITED STATES HAS CEASED TO BE ONE, IS A DEMOCRACY MINED FROM WITHIN, IS A CANCEROUS DEMOCRACY," WHICH NO LONGER OFFERS THE WORLD THE APPEARANCE OF SOLIDARITY REQUIRED TO RESIST COMMUNISM. THESE CRITICS HAVE NOTHING TO SAY AS TO WHAT BETTER HOLE THEY WOULD SEEK IF THE UNITED STATES DID IN FACT GO DOWN, BUT THEIR ANTIPATHY TOWARD LIBERAL ELEMENTS IN US THINKING (OF WHICH SENATOR KENNEDY IS THE ARCH REPRESENTATIVE) IS ABUNDANTLY CLEAR.

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10. IN THE IMMEDIACY OF THE CRISIS IN VIETNAM, THE CHILEANS HAVE AS WE SEE IT INDULGED IN A VAST AND OVERSIMPLIFIED OVERREACTION. IN OUR PRIVATE CONTACTS WE DO OUR BEST TO INSTILL IN THEM A BIT OF BALANCE, AND A SENSE OF HISTORY. WE POINT OUT TO THEM THAT NO VITAL CENTER OF THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN TOUCHED; THAT ANY COUNTRY WHICH HAS SPENT AS MUCH BLOOD AND TREASURE AS THE US HAS SPENT ON VIETNAM CAN HARDLY BE SAID TO BE INCONSTANT; AND THAT IT WOULD BE WELL FOR THEM TO SUSPEND APOCALYPTIC JUDGMENTS UNTIL THEY SEE THE SHAPE OF THE WORLD AFTER VIETNAM AND THE NEW POLICY ORIENTATIONS EMERGING WITHIN THE US.

11. IN THIS CONNECTION, WE HAVE FOUND ESPECIALLY HELPFUL THE SECRETARY'S ADDRESS OF APRIL 17. WHILE IT IS TOO SOON TO ASSESS

THE EFFECT HERE OF THE PRESIDENT'S TULANE UNIVERSITY SPEECH OF APRIL 23, WE WILL POINT OUT TO THE CHILEANS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS CALL TO GET VIETNAM BEHIND US AND TO LOOK TO WHAT THE COUNTRY CAN DO IN THE FUTURE.

12. WHAT MOST CHILEANS, APART FROM THE SUBMERGED LEFT, WOULD LIKE FROM THE US ABOVE ALL IS REASSURANCE THAT WE INTEND TO CONTINUE TO MEET OUR OLD COMMITMENTS. THE CHILEANS DEEPLY WANT TO SEE A POWERFUL US ENJOYING A RENEWED DOMESTIC CONSENZAEX IN FOREIGN POLICY, ABLE AND WILLING TO HELP SUSTAIN FRIENDS WHO WILL HELP THEMSELVES. TO BE SURE, THEY WOULD LIKE TO HAVE US GIVE GREATER WEIGHT TO IDEOLOGICAL, COLD WAR CONSIDERATIONS. BUT IN AN IMPERFECT WORLD, A STRONG US REMAINS TO THEM A CLEAR NECESSITY.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, POLITICAL SITUATION, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975SANTIA02941
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750146-0153
From: SANTIAGO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750416/aaaaaowa.tel
Line Count: 184
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 SEP 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <14 NOV 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CHILEAN REACTION TO EVENTS IN INDOCHINA
TAGS: PFOR, CI, US, XF
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006